

FACTSHEET

Plant Protection & Quarantine Veterinary Services

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Animal and
Plant Health
Inspection
Service

April 1995

How APHIS Facilitates Agricultural Imports

As the world moves closer to the 21st century, nations have modified their ideas of protectionism and embraced such international trade agreements as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). Countries have opened their doors a little wider to the prospects of new trade, particularly in the area of agriculture. With this increased interest in agricultural trade comes a bigger, more visible role for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS).

APHIS helps to facilitate agricultural trade for both importers and exporters, and its Plant Protection and Quarantine (PPQ) unit is central to the successful flow of healthy commodities into and out of the United States. PPQ is responsible for ensuring that healthy seeds, plants, bulbs, timber, flowers, vegetables, fruits, and a multitude of other agricultural commodities can be imported without risk to agriculture and natural resources. APHIS' Veterinary Services (VS) unit ensures that animals and animal products, such as semen and embryos, can be imported into this country without threatening the health of U.S. animals.

APHIS' Role in Plant Importation

Over the years, Americans have come to count on a diverse array of agricultural products for their dinner table. In order to fulfill the ever-changing tastes of Americans, the United States imports commodities from around the globe. Local grocery stores now carry everything from Mexican artichokes to Italian zucchini. In 1994 alone, the United States imported 24.4 billion dollars' worth of agricultural products.

Some foreign countries have agricultural pests and diseases that do not exist in this country and could cause devastating damage were they to be introduced here. Consequently, PPQ strives to ensure that these imported products are pest and disease free. PPQ

does this by regulating the importation of agricultural products as well as helping to ensure that inspections are performed for admissible products and treatments are administered to infested products before they are released into trade channels.

PPQ advises importers on phytosanitary restrictions and requirements and provides importers with information (including regulations, policies, and procedures) on agricultural commodities they wish to import into this country. For instance, if an importer wants to bring in a shipment of cut flowers from the Netherlands, PPQ officers provide the importer with U.S. phytosanitary requirements in advance so the flowers can enter this country expeditiously.

Importers must procure import permits for many, but not all, commodities before the goods begin their trip to the United States. Importers must also obtain phytosanitary certificates for certain commodities from the exporting country. These certificates verify that the quarantine officials of the exporting country have examined the commodities for pests and diseases prior to the commodities' departure from the country, so pests like the Egyptian cotton worm and diseases like chrysanthemum white rust are not introduced into U.S. agriculture. For some commodities, there are no acceptable quarantine treatments that have been proven to destroy pests and diseases of concern; these commodities are not allowed to be imported. Importers may obtain information or import permits by contacting
USDA-APHIS-PPQ

Permit Unit

4700 River Road, Unit 136

Riverdale, MD 20737-1236

Telephone (301) 734-8645

Telefax (301) 734-5786

PPQ officers also work in some foreign countries inspecting agricultural commodities before shipment to the United States in order to facilitate the products' movement to markets. One of the most successful of these preclearance programs is in Holland, where PPQ officers have been inspecting flower bulbs since 1951. In Chile, PPQ has been inspecting all fruits and vegetables destined for U.S. consumers since 1983.

Importing Animals, Birds, and Animal Products

VS, another unit in APHIS, regulates the importation of live animals, poultry, pet birds, and animal products, such as meats, cheeses, casein, gelatins, certain animal hides and racks, and germplasm—both semen and embryos. VS carefully monitors all of these commodities in case they are infected with foreign animal diseases, like avian influenza or foot-and-mouth disease, that could threaten U.S. livestock populations. For example, countries that have outbreaks of foot-and-mouth disease are not allowed to export fresh, chilled, or frozen meats to the United States. However, such meat products can be shipped into this country if they have been commercially heat processed or cured according to APHIS standards. VS establishes similar requirements for countries where other animal diseases exist. Certain live animals, including pet birds, imported from foreign countries may have to be quarantined in USDA animal import centers located in New York, Miami, Honolulu, or Los Angeles before entering the United States.

For permit applications and information about import requirements and user fees for animals, birds, and animal products, contact

USDA-APHIS-VS

National Center for Import/Export

4700 River Road, Unit 40

Riverdale, MD 20737-1231

Telephone (301) 734-3294

Telefax (301) 734-6402

Importing CITES-Listed Plants

Many plants and animals whose populations are threatened in the wild are protected by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). The purpose of this treaty is to regulate the commercial trade of endangered and threatened plants and animals and monitor trade involving species that may become extinct in the near future.

PPQ enforces the plant provisions of CITES and inspects all plants and plant products presented for importation at any of its 15 designated plant inspection stations located nationwide, or at other inspection ports approved by the U.S. Department of the Interior. Importers should contact the PPQ Permit Unit if they have any questions about importing CITES-listed plants. If you have questions about importing CITES-listed animals or animal products, contact the U.S. Department of the Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service at 1-800-358-2104.

In 1993, approximately 11.5 million endangered plants were presented for clearance at PPQ's inspection stations. PPQ inspectors examine each and every one of the CITES-listed plants to ensure that the plant specimens match the description of the accompanying CITES documents. If importers do not have the proper documents, the PPQ officers seize the plants and offer them back to their country of origin at that country's expense, or they place the plants in one of the many designated rescue centers in this country, where they may be displayed for the public to enjoy. PPQ also requires that importers obtain a general permit costing \$70 from the PPQ Permit Unit for any commercial shipments of CITES-listed products they wish to bring into this country.

Facilitating Trade

These days, under the influences of trade agreements such as NAFTA and GATT, agricultural trade is booming. And APHIS' dual role of facilitating agricultural exports while protecting American agriculture has become even more crucial. PPQ's export certification efforts inspire much-needed trust from foreign countries that they are receiving healthy, pest- and disease-free agricultural shipments. Moreover, APHIS' efforts on the homefront to protect American agriculture ensure that U.S. consumers can continue to enjoy the tastes of America while still sampling the tastes of the world.